**Christ’s Ambassadors 27.3.22 2Corinthians 5 v 14-21**

Have you ever been on a group holiday? Perhaps you arrive at the airport or at a coach station and you look around you and look at your fellow travellers – and what a peculiar lot they seem. And I wonder what those people are thinking about us.

And the whole of scripture teaches us that whilst man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the inside and, says Paul, we have to correct our false impressions even where Jesus is concerned. In the days before his conversion, Paul had seen Jesus merely as another Jewish religious leader and no more. He’d seen Jesus in a purely human way. But no longer and in v17 Paul says ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.’ And Paul isn’t speaking of people trying to improve themselves by discipline or rigorous exercises. Here is nothing less than a new creation. That is what God sees when He looks at us and it’s God’s power that enables it to come about. Notice the verbs in this passage. There are 7 verbs and God is the subject of them. God’s gracious initiative to get involved, God not counting men’s sins against them, God reconciling Himself to us through Jesus, God who makes Jesus to be sin for us, God making His appeal to the world through us being His ambassadors, God the author of reconciliation, and God giving us the ministry of reconciliation. so it’s God reconciling, God who’s appealing, God is giving, God who makes Jesus to be sin for us. God is the author of reconciliation and Christ is the agent of reconciliation. Sin is not a little thing to God it’s really serious and is the wall that separates us from Him. On the cross God broke down the wall of his judgment which kept us insulated from him and God did it. Jesus took the full weight of that wall and in v 21 for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Or, as the Message says ‘God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God’.

 Only such a phenomenon could have created such a new people in Europe in the 1st century, only such a phenomenon could have outlasted the Roman empire and outlived all the tyrannies of history and changed the face of this world. As the early historical commentators observe of Christians – they observed the appointed laws, they surpassed them in their own lives rather than compromising them. For example, not only would Christians not act immorally but they would strive not think immorally.

And all sorts of things flow on from our new creation in Jesus. A new attitude to other people and a new attitude to Jesus and a new relationship to God. But there’s also a new responsibility to the world. God is entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. God is making his appeal to the world through us. God is entrusting to us all of this. God is the action so let’s be very reassured if we feel inadequate or if we feel guilty about not speaking out for Jesus. Certainly we must be on hand and be ready to pray, to single out that person who God is directing me to, how can I help that person. We must be ready to outlive and outlove but in the end it’s God who does it.

V20 says that we have become ambassadors for Christ. Paul’s image of the Christian as an ambassador is a powerful and telling one. If you are an ambassador you represent your country and it will be judged by your example. An ambassador’s conduct will commend the country they represent. As a country’s ambassador it’s a great privilege and when you speak on behalf of your country you say my country thinks this or says that. You speak with the authority of your country.

God always intended us to have the authority He gave us in creation in Genesis 1 v 26,27 God said let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over all the earth ….

That authority was lost to sin when Adam and Eve chose to be under the authority of Satan but Jesus redeemed that authority in Himself and in Galatians 2:20 we read ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me’. This is our new creation. We tend to think we are over here and Jesus is over there. But our new creation is Christ in me. *I no longer live but Christ lives in me.* As ambassadors we enforce the victory that Christ has gained.

In Joshua 10 we read that Joshua and the Israelite army had fought a battle against a coalition of 5 armies and had been victorious. The five kings had fled and been captured and we read ‘*they brought the five kings out of the cave – the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him ‘Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings’ So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you are going to fight’. Then Joshua struck and killed the kings.*

 Joshua was saying – it’s not just my victory it’s yours. In Luke 10:19 Jesus told his disciples ‘*I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you’.* We are a new creation. Believe it and have faith to live it.

Do you know whom Jesus thought had the greatest faith? Not Peter or John the Baptist. It was the Roman centurion. Matthew 8 *When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help. Lord he said my servant lies at home paralysed and in terrible suffering. Jesus said to him I will go and heal him. The centurion replied, Lord I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, Go and he goes and that one Come and he comes. I say to my servant do this and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him. I tell you the truth I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.*

The reason behind the centurion’s faith was that he understood authority. Jesus has all authority. Philippians 2: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And Paul goes on Therefore dear friend continue to work out your salvation for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Luke 17 v 5 ‘*The apostles said to the Lord Increase our faith. He replied, If you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and planted in the sea and it will obey*.’ Jesus is saying that the key to great faith is to understand our own authority which has been given to us through Him.

When an officer is commissioned into the armed services he receives the Queen’s commission. We reposing special trust and confidence in your loyalty courage and good conduct do constitute and appoint you to be an officer in ……… from….

You are in such a manner and on such occasions as may be proscribed by Us to exercise and well disciple such officers, men and women as may be placed under your orders ….

And we do hereby Command them to Obey you as their superior officer and you to observe and follow such orders and directions as from time to time You will receive from Us or any superior officer according to the Rules and Discipline of War in pursuance of the trust hereby reposed in you.

Given at Her Majesty’s command at the ~Court of St. James the ….day in the ….year of Our Reign.

As an officer who has received the commission from the Queen is her effectively saying as the Head of the Commonwealth you have my authority to do what is needed to be done to accomplish your task for the benefit of my Kingdom.

Look at the words ‘we do hereby command them to obey you as their superior officer’ and that makes us think of all the things under the authority of Jesus and Jesus saying ‘I have commanded them to obey you’. The authority comes from the Queen, the authority comes from the Lord. But then comes the words ‘for you to observe and follow such orders and directions as from time to time you will receive from us or any superior officer.’ The Queen has in the commission gone ahead of time and commanded an officer’s soldiers to obey them and likewise for the officer to obey the commands of their superior officer. Likewise we too have been commissioned and we go out under the mantle of Jesus’ authority.

Let’s go back to the Great Commission where the Lord of all has commissioned His followers to do His work. Matthew 28 v 19-21 Jesus came to them after the resurrection and said ‘*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’* Jesus didn’t just say go. He told them to go under his authority.

We have Jesus’ authority to use it, to exercise it in fulfilment of His mission. Jesus wants us to use His authority because God’s Kingdom work is done through His people. A word of warning – having Christ’s authority is not to build up our own esteem it is to be do His works for His glory.

 After the end of the Second World War, Japanese soldiers carried on fighting because they hadn’t been told that the war was over. Likewise today there are millions who don’t know that a holy God and sinful men and women are reconciled through the death of Jesus. These people don’t have to be flushed out of the jungle, they exist on our doorstep. They are our neighbours and family members. Christians have a wonderful life changing message to share. It’s a job with dignity. The Christian ambassador speaks for Christ. Paul encapsulates the message in v21 ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’ James Denny in his commentary says ‘here in this verse the two opposites meet – the divine nature and the sin of the world. Divine purity hangs on the cross and says there’s the rogue, there’s the cheat, there’s the liar and salvation points at the sinner and says in the light of the cross there is purity – it’s been credited to your name. There is righteousness – no sins will be there to confront you on the day of judgement. The transaction has taken place and all this is from God. God has done it all.

To summarise –

Jesus died for all and through His death on the cross he stood in the gap between sinful men and women and enabled them to be reconciled to God.

In accepting God’s reconciliation we become a new creation standing under the authority of the Lord of all but serving as His ambassadors with all of His authority. So when we hold fast to our call, to the final command of our King to go and make disciples of all nations, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, to preach the gospel throughout the whole world, to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to move mountains and obstacles that get in our way, we must remember we do it all in the name of Jesus by His authority.